



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Pentecost 10, Proper 12 – Year B**  
**July 29, 2018**

**[RCL]: 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21**

### **2 Samuel 11:1-15**

I recently had a gentleman ask me, “Why do we believe that David is in Heaven? Look at what he did during his life!” Certainly, one could retort, “Well, look at all the good things he did, too.” David wrote so many psalms, for example, and was said to be a person “after [God’s] heart” (Acts 13:22).

You wouldn’t guess that David had so many shining attributes if you were limited to this passage, however. We don’t see any redemptive qualities to David, and this is precisely the point. From this story and its place in the wider Biblical narrative, we learn yet again that God works through even the worst of situations and the worst of intentions to somehow – mysteriously – bring about salvation. It is all too easy to focus on the sin and the brokenness in the present; it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture of God’s unfolding kingdom. Likewise, it is easy in this story to just focus on David’s evil intentions. We should not forget, though, that the Savior came from the lineage which was established through David’s affair with Bathsheba. God used David’s lowest point to bring salvation to the whole world.

- How has God worked through your brokenness?

### **Psalm 14**

I am truly grateful that psalms like this exist, that they were placed in the Bible, and that we pray them frequently in our liturgies and in our devotional lives. Why? This one in particular, to me, touches on the heart of the human condition. To clarify, I am not talking about the view of human brokenness portrayed in the psalm, what some people would call *total depravity*. No, I am talking about the disheveled and paradoxical nature of the psalm itself.

The Psalmist seems very confused. He talks about how nobody “does any good” and how no one seeks after God, but he also talks about a people who are righteous. Later, he talks about how evil-doers “eat up” God’s people. Yet, these evil-doers “tremble with fear” because God is in the midst of the very people they are destroying. We are left with a question: What is the Psalmist actually praying for? We see hope comingled with despair, righteousness comingled with sin. We get the sense that the Psalmist both knows and doesn’t know what to pray for. Here we see a truly human prayer.

- Is it comforting to you whenever it seems as though psalmists don’t seem like they know quite what they want to pray for?

## Ephesians 3:14-21

For the past several months I have been struck by how short-sighted I tend to be whenever it comes to my own spirituality, particularly when the minister comes to the Eucharistic prayer in the liturgy. If you are like me, you believe in the real presence of Jesus in the sacrament. I truly do believe that God is present in the bread and the wine. Yet all too often, I forget that God also *dwells in me*, and that I should not only contemplate God's presence within the bread and wine, but that I should also contemplate God's presence within me.

This passage in Ephesians reminds us that Paul prays for a reality that far too few people actually take the time to think about; that God really is present within human beings. Paul does not simply pray that God's people would have a little bit of Jesus within their hearts. What does he pray for? That our inner beings would be strengthened, that Christ would live in our hearts, and that we would "comprehend" the breadth, length, height, and depth of this love of God that is within us. Paul would have us comprehend a love which is incomprehensible and, thus, be filled with the "fullness of God."

- Have you taken the time to pray (along with Paul) that you would be filled with the fullness of God?

## John 6:1-21

Not too long ago, my wife and I were getting ready to go to the seminary chapel service. Just a few minutes before walking out the door, we received a phone call and learned that someone very dear to us had died during the night. After we got off the phone, we began to weep, and we wrestled with whether or not we should still go to chapel. Did we want to weep in front of all our friends? Did we want to mourn in such a public space?

We decided to go. It was one of the most blessed worship experiences we've ever had. Life has a tendency to pull us away from church, to pull us away from the grace that God bestows through the sacraments. Sometimes it feels as though the Eucharist – that simple little cracker and that tiny sip of wine – is not enough. Yet, if you are like me, you often walk away amazed by how powerful and redemptive the Eucharist has been in the moments we need it most. Our Gospel reading puts imagery to a feeling that we all feel. Sometimes we doubt, saying, "What can Jesus do with this little cracker and this sip of wine?" Then we walk away from the altar sensing just how much God has multiplied his grace, and how satiated we actually feel.

- Can you remember a specific time when you didn't want to go to church and receive the sacrament but walked away feeling transformed by the experience?

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